

TIMELY TOPICS



DIocese OF COLUMBUS, OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATECHESIS

Advent: Through Another's Eye

For weeks already, the stores and ads are full of the “Buy Now” slogans that anticipate the season of Christmas. The Church, meanwhile, is entering into the more reflective season of Advent, a time of preparing to celebrate God’s tremendous gift of love in Jesus, who is *Emmanuel*, “God-with-us.” This **Mystery of the Incarnation** invites us to look beyond ourselves for the human face of Jesus.

This year we especially recognize Jesus’ face in the suffering people of Haiti. January, 2011, is the first anniversary of the devastating earthquake that killed over 230,000 Haitians and left almost 2 million living in flimsy plastic tents under horrendous conditions. Besieged in recent weeks by the violent remnants of Hurricane Tomas and the spread of cholera, the Haitian people face a bleak future not likely to be changed any time soon.

Fr. Fitzner Valcin, pastor, and Nedy Melidor, a parishioner of the Haitian Catholic community here in Columbus, have offered to share an account of the festivities that Haitian people traditionally enjoy throughout Advent and Christmas. See pages 2 and 3.

In sharing the diverse ways that people of various cultures celebrate this great feast of the Mystery of the Incarnation, we recall that Jesus, truly human as well as truly divine, was the child of a particular woman who lived in a particular time and place; he grew to adulthood within a particular culture and religious tradition.

According to the *National Directory for Catechesis*, **the Incarnation can be seen as “the model for all evangelization.”** (NDC, #21-A)

- ☞ “Just as ‘the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us’ (Jn 1:14), so too . . . the word of God proclaimed to the nations, must take root in the life situation of the hearers of the word” (NDC, #21-B)
- ☞ “Inculturation is a requirement for evangelization . . . the process by which ‘catechesis takes flesh’ in the various cultures” (NDC, #21-B)
- ☞ “Inculturation involves listening to the culture of the people for an echo of the word of God. (NDC, #21-C)

The Diocese of Columbus is home to Catholics from many cultures besides the traditionally Catholic cultures of Western Europe: Haitian, Brazilian, Goan, Vietnamese, Korean, Laotian, African-American, Eritrean, Nigerian, and a number of Latino communities from such places as Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, etc. The living Word of God has become rooted in the midst of many peoples!

Perhaps this Advent season is the time to make a conscious effort to **become acquainted with another culture**, to listen for the “echo of the word of God” and to recognize the presence – the Incarnation – of Jesus in all the varied traditions that so enrich our Catholic faith.

But this year, especially, Advent provides an opportunity for us to remember our sisters and brothers in Haiti, to step out of ourselves and learn the beauty of their culture, as well as to respond to their suffering. The Incarnation is an incomprehensible gift of love; we are commanded to be, and to share, that love. For Christians, this is the heart of the Christmas celebration. And Advent gives us time to open *our* hearts to God and to the neighbors we are commanded to love.

The Haitian Catholic Community, based at St. Matthias Church, celebrates a Creole mass each Sunday at 1:30 p.m.

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A Haitian Holiday by Fr. Fitzner Valcin and Nedy Melidor

The dream to have a Haitian Catholic Community in central Ohio has become a reality! The Haitian Catholic Coalition of Ohio, one of the youngest Catholic Communities in the Diaspora, began in central Ohio in December, 2005. On this coming December 26, we will celebrate our fifth anniversary in Columbus.

The mission of the HCC of Ohio is to improve the quality of life of Haitians in Ohio by providing educational, spiritual, informational, social, leadership development opportunities through evangelizing the non-English speaking Haitians and connecting the youth with their roots.

The Haitian people have a unique culture and tradition of worshiping God wherever they are throughout the globe. During the liturgical year, Christians celebrate major events to nourish their spiritual life with the Lord. The Haitian people, whether religious or not, participate very actively in those events that keep our culture alive and that strengthen our religiosity.

As Haitians residing outside of Haiti, we follow the same spiritual traditions of the Church in the United States with a vibe of the Haitian culture from our ancestors. Among those events are the following:

Advent

During the Advent period it is amazing to observe how people are diligently more concerned to grasp every aspect of life. Advent tends to make Haitians more active and re-energized for a new beginning. Advent, symbolizing hope, reminds Haitians to persevere in the journey of waiting, but also poses a question of what or whom are we waiting for? As Christians we are certainly waiting for our Lord and Savior to come; for others it may be different. Every Advent we have different groups all over the country organize national competitions called *Konkou Chante Noel* for the most talented singers or performers. Singing all over the streets, kids are playing with *pluie d'étoiles* (fireworks) and reciting poems and singing Haiti's most popular Christmas song, *Petit Papa Noel*. Haiti is the most popular country in the Caribbean Island for either performing or singing.

December 8th

In the midst of Advent we have on December 8 one of the big Catholic celebrations, the **Immaculate Conception**. Haitians emphasize this feast called *Immaculee*. Many parishes are under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception and it is one of Haiti's national holidays. Faithful and curious people will not miss the feast which is always begun by a novena. Immaculate Conception is about solemnity, from the celebrants/concelebrants (in white) to the faithful participants (dressed in blue/white), including the decoration of the buildings (blue/white) with all kind of ornaments. At nine that feast Day it is a tradition to have processions with the statue of the Virgin which is sometimes even carried out into the

street, followed by different groups of people reciting prayers, litanies, burning candles. Some carry photos of loved ones, to ask the intercession of the Virgin Mother. With this celebration people feel their working forward into Christmas.

Christmas Eve, December 24th

We celebrate Christmas with a traditional party called *Reveillon*, one of a Haitian's favorite celebrations. Most groups, religious or not, have their own *reveillon*. It is a big night party where friends collect money to get food, drink and to spend the rest of the night after the religious celebration, which is one of the Haitian "untouchable" traditions. The mass is usually held at midnight even if just to sing *Minuit Chrétiens*, or Silent Night, also to better recall that Jesus was born at night and to experience the peace that his birth brings to the world. Children usually love Christmas for the night in and out and moreover for what *Tonton Noel* (Santa Claus) has brought to the lucky ones. Although this practice of gift-giving is widespread in Haiti, it is easy also to understand why Christmas is considered as a children's feast.



Tin Wall Art from Haiti

Christmas Day, December 25th

Christmas Day for Haitians is a moment to rejoice in the birth of the new born King and a time to relax with the family. In addition to celebrating religiously, it is also a day for many groups to hold Christmas parties for the poor, called *Noel des Pauvres*. Often it is the only one day that most people think and act in favor of the unfortunate.

January 1st

The week before January 1st is a week of migration for the Haitians. It is common to observe them leaving the big cities, most often leaving Port-au-Prince, the capital, to meet their parents in the small towns in order to celebrate with the rest of the extended family. New Year's Day is a day of family gathering and of thanksgiving. It also is called the Haitian Independence Day. On that day the president and his staff attend the traditional Mass called *Te Deum* (Thanksgiving to God), celebrated most often at the cathedral of Port-au-Prince,* before they go to Gonaives, the city of birth of the Independence to address the nation and help us remember our heroes with all kinds of celebrations, parades, etc. In addition, individuals rejoice by eating pumpkin soup throughout the country, visiting friends and relatives, wishing Happy New Year to everybody. Nowadays, Haitians prefer hearing "Have a good health" to "Happy New Year" because a new year never happens.



January 6th

Although liturgically the Christmas period ends with the Baptism of the Lord, for Haitians generally the festivities of Christmas end on January 6th called *les Rois* (the Kings). At this time people are not really looking for religious celebrations but only for festivities. If January 1st is known as a day for the kids, January 6th is known as a day for adults. It is their turn to dress up properly and to go out from house-to-house to visit people, to make gifts and to receive theirs.

In a cosmopolitan, developed city like Columbus, Haitian people still struggle to stay faithful with their tradition.



We cannot close this segment without thinking of the resilient Haitian people, in and out of Haiti, who are facing all kind of difficulties and are preparing to cope with the 1st anniversary of **JANUARY 12, 2010**, when more than 200,000 people died and approximately 1.2 million left to live under plastic tents. This anniversary will be another key moment for the Haitian communities, including the HCC of Ohio, and Haitians' friends around the world to gather together in remembering this catastrophic event.

**the cathedral was severely damaged in the January, 2010, earthquake and the bishop was killed, along with a number of seminarians.*

IDEAS For Any Age

- ☞ Use the in-service on page 4, to encourage honoring the reflective, prayerful aspect of Advent and observing it as a time for giving something of ourselves, in anticipation of celebrating God's great gift to us.
- ☞ Invite learners to bring in information about (and examples of) how their families observe Advent and prepare for Christmas. Use this as an opportunity to become more aware of other cultures and peoples, and to appreciate our unity in faith.
- ☞ Refer to previous *Timely Topics* on [cultural celebrations](#) for this season at our website, especially Nov. 9, 2009; Nov. 30, 2009; Dec. 15, 2008.
- ☞ Visit the website for [Catholic Relief Services](#) at for ways to contribute to aid for Haiti, as well as to learn other activities of CRS.
- ☞ Most publishers of religious books/textbooks have Advent and Christmas ideas and resources on their websites. For example, visit <http://www.pflaum.com/> and follow the links for the *Gospel Weeklies* "Family Pages" for age-appropriate activities and prayers that engage the whole family in either the school or parish setting.

In-service suggestion

Need: Bible and purple cloth to place under it; paper and pens/pencils; a globe or a map that includes Haiti.
Open with communion-prayer from the liturgy for the first Monday of Advent:

**Come to us, Lord, and bring us peace.
We will rejoice in your presence
and serve you with all our heart.**

Advent is the Church's time to help us ready our hearts to recognize the great gift of the Lord's presence among us. It helps us to focus on *Emmanuel*, "God-with-us," and to be able to see Jesus in each other. In our families we have various traditions for celebrating this season, depending on our ethnic and cultural backgrounds. We sing certain songs, eat certain foods, gather for religious observances, etc. . . .

Table-Talk: *Take a moment to jot down some of the ways you celebrate with family and friends – what foods do you share? What is the place of gift-giving? What religious events do you observe? Share these with each other at your tables . . .*

Advent also calls us to look beyond our everyday circumstances to those who celebrate this season under very different circumstances and with different traditions, yet are our sisters and brothers in Christ. In a few weeks we will observe the first anniversary of the devastating earthquake that destroyed the capital city of Haiti, killed over 230,000 people, left nearly 2 million living under pieces of cardboard and tin in the most deplorable conditions. Rebuilding is likely years away.

Table-Talk: *What might you and your learners do, in response to Jesus' command to love God and to love our neighbors as ourselves? What would help you to experience this Advent as a time of opening up your hearts to "God-with-us" in your Haitian sisters and brothers? What can you learn from them? How can you respond to them?*

Closing prayer from the entrance-prayer for the first Monday of Advent

**Nations, hear the message of the Lord,
and make it known to the ends of the earth:
Our Savior is coming.
Have no more fear.**

Correlation to Certification Standards, the Course of Study, & the Six Tasks of Catechesis

National Certification Standards for Lay Ecclesial Ministers

I-1.4: Discern and address current realities in the Church and the world in light of the Gospel

III-3.6.1: Articulating pastoral responses that invite the community into discipleship and witness according to the pastoral needs of people from various cultures

IV-4.3: Understand and appreciate the gifts diverse cultures bring to the faith community

Religion Graded Course of Study

Standard III-C: Describe the importance of Sunday liturgy and the meaning of traditions, rituals and customs of the liturgical year

Standard IV-F: Describe the Kingdom of God as the presence of God's love, peace and justice in the world

Six Tasks of Catechesis

Liturgical Life, Prayer, Communal Life and Missionary Spirit.